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## **Submission to the Select Committee on Regional Australia**

11 November 2019

*[www.anglicare.asn.au](http://www.anglicare.asn.au)*

## About Anglicare Australia

Anglicare Australia is a network of independent local, state, national and international organisations that are linked to the Anglican Church and are joined by values of service, innovation, leadership and the Christian faith that every individual has intrinsic value. With a combined expenditure of \$1.59 billion, a workforce close to 20,000 staff and 9,000 volunteers, the Anglicare Australia Network contributes to more than 50 service areas in the Australian community. In all, 1 in every 20 Australians access Anglicare services throughout the year. Our services are delivered in partnership with people, the communities in which they live, and other like-minded organisations in those areas.

Anglicare Australia has as its Mission “to partner with people, families and communities to build resilience, inclusion and justice”. Our first strategic goal charges us with reaching this by “influencing social and economic policy across Australia...informed by research and the practical experience of the Anglicare Australia Network”.

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## Introduction

Anglicare Australia appreciates the opportunity to submit to this important inquiry. The committee has been established ‘to examine how regional Australia can grow and prosper in a way that benefits everyone.’ Social services are an essential component of healthy communities and regional economies. Growth and sustainability in regional areas are closely tied to the development of the core services that support and maintain the wellbeing of the people who live in them. This is particularly true when communities are facing challenging times.

Research into community resilience –how communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and other crises – show the factors that contribute to ongoing viability and wellbeing. As an example, research on six communities following a series of devastating earthquakes in the Canterbury region of New Zealand showed that connected communities, with strong pre-existing community infrastructure, made it easier to initiate local responses, foster community involvement and access support. Communities with fewer community-based groups, local leaders or existing networks found it more difficult to respond and adapt. Existing hardship and socioeconomic disadvantage seemed to be exacerbated by the disaster and its consequences<sup>i</sup>.

The research sheds light on how to foster strong, engaged communities in a disaster context and under ‘normal’ conditions. Community-led action; community infrastructure for disadvantaged or marginalised areas; and strong partnerships between communities and authorities were all important strategies for community resilience. The work also showed why it is important to build strong, engaged communities— these communities cope better with crises. The research also emphasised that unless these communities are resourced they are unable to carry out their vital role.

We see this inquiry as an opportunity to contribute our perspective on the challenges and opportunities of delivering on our mission in regional Australia. We will focus on the factors that promote resilience and help to deal with change; and that contribute to strong and engaged communities.

Our submission relies on the Regional Australia Institute’s definition of Regional Australia being all areas that lie beyond the major five cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, and Adelaide) and Canberra.

## **A voice from Anglicare Central Queensland**

We begin this submission by citing some reflections from staff at Anglicare in Central Queensland. These insights illustrate many of the typical challenges and opportunities that regional communities in Australia face today. They show the importance of bringing all sectors of society together if our regional communities are to become and remain strong, connected and engaged:

Central Highlands Regional Council, Banana Shire and Central West all share amazingly resilient communities that have survived through community collaboration and cohesion; droughts, floods, bushfires, economic booms and busts with resource prices, and changing farming practices. Over the past few years, these communities have faced a number of challenging marketing policies and processes (i.e. “get big or get out”) and the entry of the resource sector (coal & gas) into the landscape.

### **Unequal impacts and social cohesion**

The resource sector has sociologically had the most significant impact on the remote communities in the Bowen Basin, i.e. Central Highlands, with populations doubling and with people coming to work and living in camps – “fly in fly out” – and being isolated from community activities. This has had positive aspects such as job opportunities, increase in learning skills, younger people remaining in the area on apprenticeships and traineeships, community grants, and community participation in addition to farmers being able to access employment in a 7 on 7 off capacity to mitigate financial stress. However, it has also led to challenging changes such as less cohesion in community, housing rentals in the boom times reaching beyond ordinary wage earners (up to \$1500 a week for a house), increase in the disparity of wages and a shift away from the perception “we do it tough but do it together” to a stronger sense of division between cohorts.

The Local Government amalgamation has also had and continues to have a major impact on community identity. Once most community activities were voluntarily created and run. Although that still occurs this is more in silos rather than across whole communities. In one community the average age of meals on wheels volunteers is 81.5 years.

### **Long term social and economic development**

A question to be asked is how do we continue to have the strengths of traditional remote communities but bring in the opportunities and embrace the challenges of the new. For example, environmental impact assessments focus on the physical environment and although comment on the social environment is sought, it generally ends up as about one paragraph in a 200 page document. Companies extract resources over the lifetime they are available (15 to 40 years), but there seems to be

no effective planning for what happens next. The little grants to community are great, but where is the vision and planning of what could be? During this life could there not be a partnership between companies, community and government to build alternative industries within these communities that would then be sustainable beyond the life of the resource extraction?

This reflection from our colleagues in Central Queensland shows that there are many pressures on regional Australia. There are also a number of opportunities that could allow communities to thrive if major players worked together to create sustainability, innovation and resilience.

As the analysis from Christchurch makes clear, social service infrastructure underpins the wellbeing of regional communities, and makes sustainability, innovation, and resilience possible. In order to ensure such infrastructure, Anglicare Australia believes that the following core aspects need be addressed.

### **Employment generation in the social service sector**

There is an increasing demand for social assistance and care which is intrinsic to the health of communities. It also presents an opportunity for job creation. The Regional Australia Institute predicts that the social assistance and health care industries will be the main drivers of employment growth in regional areas, expected to contribute over 85,000 jobs in regional areas between 2018 and 2023<sup>ii</sup>. For example, there is a higher demand for aged care services outside of major cities. As a higher proportion of older people are located in rural and remote areas, this trend is expected to continue over the coming decades.<sup>iii</sup> The populations in regional towns and remote communities are not as healthy as those of the major cities, which again drives up demand for aged care and community health services in regional Australia.

Meeting this demand will be a challenge for regional areas, and will require work to build the attractiveness of regional areas to support retention and migration of workers and their families. Community services have a key role to play as one of the largest growing sectors of employment and economic development in regional areas. These services are also critical to making these communities more liveable, helping to retain and attract workers.

### **Long-term planning for essential social services**

As a fundamental pillar of growth, sustainability and liveability in regional communities, community services need to be adequately resourced. They also need to be secure.

The precariousness and insecurity of contracts has undermined the ability of community organisations to meet local need, to make the best use of limited resources, and to act as a hub for other economic activity. The cost of continual cycles of short-term contracts was recognised by the Productivity Commission in their recent inquiry into human services.

Anglicare Australia strongly supports the Commission's recommendation to increase default contract lengths for community services to seven years. Long-term stable contracts would give staff employment stability and security, and would counteract some of the challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. It would allow service providers to develop relationships and trust within community, creating the opportunity for them to invest in innovation and improvement by collaborating with other providers, businesses and governments. This in turn helps to build sustainable community development and resilience.

As also recommended by the Commission, these services must be funded at a level that reflects efficient cost of service delivery. Too often, the real costs of social service delivery in regional areas is not accounted for. This negatively impacts program delivery. Issues include increased transport costs and risks to reaching dispersed communities (such as fuel and time; poor roads, isolation and wildlife hazards); increased cost of information technology, repairs and maintenance; and increased costs in providing professional development and training for staff. This can leave people without access to necessary services, or see those with the means relocating to metropolitan areas.

The 'tyranny of distance' is a major challenge. Funding and policy decisions tend to stem from a metropolitan perspective, which assumes service availability, adequate staffing and geographic accessibility. This is not always a reality for people living in regional areas of Australia.

For example, research on older adults who needed to care to stay in their own home showed a distinct disparity. An elderly person in a city might be able to afford to access a service several times a week, while someone in a rural area might only be able to once.<sup>iv1</sup> That's because each were given the same financial 'care package', and the older people in rural locations who had to access services that were based in metropolitan or large regional centres were then charged the travel costs to get the service to them.

All of these aspects need to be factored into long-term contracts – whether the funding follows service organisations or individuals – when considering service delivery in regional areas.

## **Service delivery models that work in regional areas**

Anglicare Australia emphasises the importance of place-based and collaborative delivery models. These models enable government, businesses and not-for-profits to come together. They enable solutions to be designed by the local 'experts' (including the end beneficiaries) and consideration of the best way to apply such solutions. They do not involve imposing models upon communities with assumptions that models can be transferred if they have worked elsewhere. The place-based nature of these models allows for co-design to support the unique characteristics of individual communities. Collaboration and collective impact

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<sup>1</sup> Cash, B. Bell, K., and Boetto, H. (2018) [Work beyond 2020: The future of social work](#). Insight.

should be encouraged and reflected in funding models. We have found that models of service delivery involving outreach from a metropolitan base often lead to diminished services for regional areas.

Anglicare Australia Network members operating in regional and remote areas see clear benefits with 'block' funded models of service delivery. These arrangements are more likely to recognise the true cost of delivering services in regional communities. Models of service delivery which employ a Unit Cost, or individualised funding models where there are no economies of scale, are unsuitable for regional and remote communities. These models lead to unsustainable services and poorer outcomes for clients under the false pretence that people are getting services unique to their needs.

Some attempts at overcoming geographical disadvantage have included digital solutions (for example, telehealth or videoconferencing). This can be improvement if there are no face-to-face alternatives, but it is ineffective when technology is not available or unreliable. Anglicare Australia notes that many regional areas continue to experience inconsistent phone coverage, that some people are unable to effectively use such technology, and others cannot pay for it.

Community development models that build local capacity are essential to ensuring growth and sustainability. A key component of this approach involves training and developing local people to be service delivery staff. This needs to be coupled with professionals who can work alongside trained local staff to build capacity. There must also be a recognition that community development programs can take up to ten years to evolve. Getting services embedded in communities and providing more primary care on the ground are proving to be increasingly important in preventing more complex issues developing in the future. That is as true in regional Australia as it is in the cities:

This excerpt from a report on the use of Communities for Children programs to improve family outcomes by Anglicare Australia member ac.care, Antenatal Dads and First Year Families, Communities for Children Murraylands shows how effective community connections can be in building capacity and resilience. It also shows how important access to a range of supports and services is:

The staff and the Antenatal Dads and First Year Families program participants who were interviewed for the ac.care Communities for Children Murraylands evaluation highlighted the importance of 'soft entry'. The programs provided are described as 'soft entry' programs that enable support to be given to families that do not traditionally attend services to improve parenting and building skills programs. This is captured in the quotations below:

“At the Antenatal Dads and First Year Families program I tell the dads about all the other programs they can access in the community. How they can go along...they don't need a referral. They can attend. We are here to help each other...it's a way of getting them connected to other services as well (S1).

“A lot of the dads have had no experience with infants and children...they don't know what to do...some are young parents to and their infants can be neglected so it's a good way to connect early and let them talk to the other dads and support each other. Antenatal Dads and First Year Families program lets them hear about other services they [fathers] can use...gives them confidence to use other services...helps them connect to other fathers and families (S2).

“We use the Antenatal Dads and First Year Families program as a way of connecting clients with other services ...providing those wrap around services. So the family support worker would provide case management, therapeutic support but also offer referrals to other agencies (S1).”

While the Antenatal Dads and First Year Families program is soft entry, it does provide referrals to other services that are also soft entry or referral only based. The programs use a range of referral pathways to other professionals to provide interdisciplinary, and holistic, family interventions. These types [sic] of 'soft entry' initiatives are important as it connects the programs with the isolated families and prepares the family and child for integrations into the health, education and social systems<sup>v</sup>.

The challenge of sewing wrap-around services and support together at a local level is much greater if the costs and complexity of creating and sustaining those connections in regional, rural and remote areas aren't properly factored in.

### **Opportunities for remote Indigenous communities**

Anglicare Australia recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this country and acknowledges the continued spiritual, physical, social and cultural connections they have with land and sea, sustained over 60,000 years.

The Committee must consider how governments and business can work in deep partnership with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In considering the sustainability and development of regional Australia, it must consider the particular opportunities presented by partnering with remote communities. . We suggest the Committee takes a positive cultural and strengths based approach to its strategy and policy initiatives for Regional Australia.

In addressing the Closing the Gap strategy, the Southgate Institute for Health, Society and

Equity identified negative and positive determinants of health that reach beyond factors such as housing, employment conditions, education, social relationships, income, poverty and the distribution of power and resources. It nominated both positive and negative determinants, including the following examples:

experiences of racism contribute to chronic stress, influence health behaviours such as smoking, and may reduce access to health care. ... [whereas] connectedness to culture and caring for country are positive determinants of Indigenous health.<sup>vi</sup>

The paper went on to recommend new directions for policy makers that put greater emphasis on positive health factors through strengths-based approaches and community-controlled services such as those delivered through the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) model.

The Productivity Commission<sup>vii</sup> is the latest body to advocate for this kind of community controlled decision-making. And of course, there is no shortage of First Nations leaders and community organisations who have been advocating this for decades, and several successful instances where it has occurred. The challenge it seems is for governments and major businesses to make it a principle of their engagement.

It is in this context that Network member Anglicare NT promotes the idea of “hybrid economies” when considering the economic and social sustainability of remote communities in Australia today.

Governments now recognise the strong likelihood of “market failure” in locations where there are “thin or non-existent markets”. But rather than approaching these locations with a true community development approach, they continue to see the world through a “market economy” lens, and fail to recognise the need for a broader and more flexible perspective that truly considers locality and culture.

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research first proposed the “hybrid economy” model in 2001.<sup>viii</sup> Professor Jon Altman notes that much of the discourse in relation to development on Aboriginal land is based on a false question: “How can development based on market engagement be delivered to communities that are remote?” He questions the superiority of the market economy model and calls for a combination of the two approaches along with a third, the ‘customary’ sector. The customary sector is constituted by non-monetised activities, such as fishing, hunting and gathering, and art creation. These emerge from and reaffirm dynamic Indigenous connections to country and ways of being, and is central to sustainable livelihoods on the Indigenous estate.<sup>ix</sup>

It is critical that we recognise how much of the national environmental and biodiversity is on Aboriginal land, with many hundreds of small communities ideally positioned to help look

after it both in their own interests and those of the nation.<sup>x</sup> We suggest that in the context of a changing climate and the need to find or re-discover increased agricultural resilience, this is the case more than ever. Indigenous Protected Areas and Indigenous Ranger programs provide excellent examples of this. As we argued in our 2017 Jobs Availability Snapshot, these programs are reinvigorating communities and driving job creation.<sup>xi</sup>

## **Community services supporting adaption to climate change**

Australia is warming and the country is experiencing temperature migrations. The nature of farming is changing,<sup>xii</sup> and drought and bushfires are very much front of mind at the time of writing this submission. They have a profound effect on rural Australia and threaten the livelihood of many farming communities as well as Aboriginal communities which suffer the cultural impacts of environmental degradation.

In August last year, Farmers for Climate Action (FCA) released a report that confronted climate change-related issues facing many regional communities. This was part of a conversation with these communities on how to diversify regional economies, particularly communities that have been through a boom-bust cycle of drought, mining and extracted industries.<sup>xiii</sup> This links back to the considerations shared by Anglicare Central Queensland, and we echo their call for all sectors of society to come together to think seriously and create sustainable solutions for regional communities in a changing environment.

There is great pressure and change in rural communities as a consequence of climate change and associated events. That pressure is particularly felt by the people that the Anglicare Australia Network supports. Indeed, community services are on the front-line helping people cope with the reality of our overheating world everywhere. Within the Anglicare Australia Network, our emergency relief services help people cope with the stress of increasing power bills. Some members provide affordable, energy efficient housing for people on low income. Others are partners in state and territory emergency action plans, helping people rebuild their lives after extreme weather and natural disasters. Across the range of services, we support the most vulnerable in our communities who have the least ability to cope and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

However, the community sector is often overlooked in climate policy. We emphasise that our sector must be properly equipped to help communities respond to climate change – and recover from the impact of change and events that are already happening. Anglicare Australia recommends the establishment of a climate adaptation fund, which would allow community organisations to apply for funding to retrofit buildings, respond to extreme weather events, and better prepare and support their clients as the changes occur.

## **Conclusion**

Our argument in this submission is simple. Any growth, development or improved wellbeing in regional Australia needs a robust and well-resourced community service sector. It is

through investing in community development and place based initiatives that Australia regions will develop the capacity and connectedness to see them through the cycles of change ahead. Members of our Network based in regional Australia tell us that we need to draw on our rich community resources, and grow the care systems we need if we are to succeed.

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<sup>i</sup> Thornley, L. et al. (2015) [Building community resilience: learning from the Canterbury earthquakes](#)

<sup>ii</sup> The Regional Australia Institute (2019) [The future of regional jobs](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Health Workforce Australia (2013). [National rural and remote workforce innovation and reform strategy](#)

<sup>iv</sup> Cash, B. et al (2018) [Work beyond 2020: The future of social work](#). Insight.

<sup>v</sup> Parry, Y.K., and Abbott, S. (2016) [ac.care, Antenatal Dads and First Year Families, Communities for Children Murraylands: Final Report](#).

<sup>vi</sup> Southgate Institute for Health, Society and Equity (2019) [Policy Brief Social Determinants of Indigenous Health and Closing the Gap](#).

<sup>vii</sup> Productivity Commission (2019) [Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory. Draft Report](#)

<sup>viii</sup> Altman J.C. (2001) [Sustainable development options on Aboriginal land: The hybrid economy in the twenty-first century](#)

<sup>ix</sup> From Russell, S. (2011) [The Hybrid Economy Topic Guide](#). Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> Anglicare Australia (2017). [Jobs Availability Snapshot 2017](#)

<sup>xii</sup> Hambrett, M. (2019) [The future of farming in the era of climate change](#). ABC News.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.